Lavatera cretica L. (Malvaceae)
Cretan Lavatera

Description. Herbaceous annual or biennial; stems 1-5 dm tall, sometimes semi-woody at the base. Leaves alternate, stipulate, stipules 5-8 mm long, the petioles 5 to 20 cm long, stellate-puberulent, the blades 4 to 15 cm long and wide, round in outline, 5-lobed, with palmate venation, minutely stellate-pubescent, sometimes becoming glabrous, base truncate to subcordate, margins toothed, apices acute to obtuse. Flowers radial, in axillary clusters, each subtended by 3 ovate bracts, 4-10 mm long, 3-6 mm wide; calyx of 5 fused sepals, the tube 5-6 mm wide, enlarging in fruit, the lobes ovate and acute; corolla of 5 petals fused at the base, petals 10-15 mm long, narrowly obovate, white, often tinged with pink or lavender, the apices notched; stamens many, fused into a tube surrounding the style; ovary superior, style exserted, with 8 to 12 stigmatic branches. Fruit disk-like, composed of 7 to 12 segments that break apart at maturity, each segment 3-4 mm long, the dorsal surface smooth to reticulate, the lateral surfaces somewhat reticulate. In California, flowering from May to September. (Fernandes 1968, Hill 1993, Munz 1959, Wiggins 1951).

Note: The closest relative of *Lavatera cretica* appears to be *Malva nicaensis* All., rather than other species of *Lavatera* (in the strict sense according to Ray 1995, 1998).

Geographic distribution. A native of western and Mediterranean Europe, *Lavatera cretica* has become naturalized in California, Australia, New Zealand, and southern Africa (Arnold and de Wet 1993, Chapman 1991, Munz 1959, Webb et al. 1988).

It presumably was widely distributed throughout the San Francisco Bay region by the end of the 19th century (Robbins 1940). *Lavatera cretica* has been reported from Anacapa and Santa Rosa islands (Junak et al. 1997) and occurs in most central and southern California coastal counties (Anonymous 1998, Hill 1993).

Reproductive and vegetative biology. No literature pertinent to the reproductive and vegetative biology of *Lavatera cretica* and related species was found. However, like other weedy Malvaceae, these species presumably are self-compatible, partly self-pollinating, and visited by small bees and flies (Faegri and van der Pijl 1979, Proctor et al. 1996).

Ecological distribution. *Lavatera cretica* has been reported to occur on disturbed sites, dunes, roadsides, and fallow fields (Fernandes 1968, Hill 1993, Munz 1959, Webb et al. 1988, Wiggins 1951).

Weed status. *Lavatra cretica* is not considered a noxious weed in agricultural or horticultural practice, at least at a global level (not listed by Holm et al. 1977), nor is it considered a noxious weed by the State Dept. of Food and Agriculture (Anonymous 1996). It is not listed for the United States in Lorenzi and Jeffery (1987). In northern Africa, it has been harvested as an edible plant (Tanji and Nassif 1995).

Microbial and insectathogens. No literature was found that reported *Lavatera* as a host of detrimental microbial or insect pathogens.

Herbicide control. No literature was found pertinent to herbicidal control. However, because of the strong relationship to *Malva* (Ray 1995, 1998), treatments prescribed for *Malva parviflora* and related species by Lorenzi and Jeffery (1987) may be appropriate.

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